

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Southern Railway Industrial Historic District
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street and number Roughly bounded by Beale, Myrtle, and the Southern Railway tracks, Linden, Jessamine and Orleans N/A ☐ not for publication
City or town Memphis N/A ☐ vicinity
stat Tennessee Code TN Count Shelby code 157 zip code 38104
e y

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☒ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

11

1

12

2

2

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY: energy facility

COMMERCE: warehouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY: energy facility

VACANT: Work in Progress

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Neo-Classical

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Poured concrete

walls Brick veneer

roof Poured tar, roll asphalt

other Glass, metal

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.) N/A

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION

INDUSTRY

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1891-1956

Significant Dates

1891, 1926

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Cameron, A.E.; Multiple; Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Southern Railway Industrial Historic District
Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 10.5 acres Northwest Memphis 409 NW

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>769718</u>	<u>3892241</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>15</u>	<u>769986</u>	<u>3892221</u>

3	<u>15</u>	<u>769991</u>	<u>3891914</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	<u>15</u>	<u>769725</u>	<u>3891954</u>

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Judith Johnson
organization Judith Johnson & Associates date August, 2006
street and number 176 Windover Cove, #1 telephone 901/603-0054
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38111

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Please see attached sheet
street and number _____ Telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 20.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0020), Washington, DC 20303.

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Southern Railway Industrial Historic District,
Shelby County, Tennessee

Narrative Description

The Southern Railway Industrial Historic District (hereafter "district") is a cohesive collection of late 19th to mid-20th century industrial buildings located approximately one mile east of the central business district in Memphis, Tennessee. The district includes nine buildings, four outbuildings and two structures built along the Southern Railroad line. The neighborhood surrounding the district is predominantly commercial and/or educational in character due to its proximity to the University of Tennessee Medical School, Southwest Tennessee Community College, and east-west highway, Linden Avenue (U.S. Highway 78). Other historic resources in the area include the Hunt-Phelan House (NR 2/11/1971) to the west at 533 Beale Street, and Sun Record Company (NHL 7/31/2003) to the northeast at 706 Union Avenue. To the southwest lies the former Vance-Pontotoc Historic District (NR 3/19/1980, removed 3/18/1987).

The buildings and structures within the district are a local representation of commercial and industrial building stock during the years 1891-1956. The buildings are in fair to good condition, ranging in height from one-to-five-stories. All are of masonry and/or steel frame construction, have flat roofs and are clad in brick veneer with a variety of applied architectural styles such as Neo-Classical and Colonial Revival. Rear and/or side additions convey use over time. Although some façade window sashes and entries have been altered, these changes are easily reversible and none of these changes detract from the district's ability to convey the feeling and associations of historical significance.

The district also retains a degree of integrity of setting, as the buildings remain unified by their relationship to the railroad line that physically connects the properties. This functional unity is visible in such features as accommodations for rail and truck transport (railroad loading doors, truck bays and loading docks). The district's integrity of location is also evoked by the district's two primary engineering features, the Norfolk-Southern rail line which still serves the district, and the 1923 Linden Avenue Subway. The subway is included as a contributing structure in the district and retains structural integrity as well as continuing use.

The building seminal to the historic development of the district is the Memphis Light and Power Building, originally constructed in 1891. The current façade was added in 1901 and two side additions were added c. 1950. Three outbuildings are associated with the Memphis Power and Light utility company building, and include a fueling station, a shed, and a garage.

Three 1920s industrial buildings are also located within the district at 690 and 702 Linden and 666-678 Beale. The buildings are constructed of cast reinforced concrete slabs supported by cast concrete columns. This construction type results in a building with discrete bays and visible structural grid. Exteriors are faced in brick with decorative cast concrete ornamentation. The exteriors of the buildings are further defined by relatively more elaborate, ornamental fronts transitioning to significantly more utilitarian, less decorative sides and rears. Although these 1920s buildings all suffer from the loss their historic first floor windows and doors, they still retain the visible pattern of openings, as well as the majority of features that characterize their style.

The one-story buildings in the district include a 1925 electrical substation, a c. 1950 shop building, a c. 1950 industrial building, and a c. 1955 body shop.

The Southern Railway Industrial Historic District is a collection of largely intact industrial buildings and structures that illustrates Memphis' industrial growth from 1891 to 1956 and which continues to be a viable area today, adapting to changing times and needs. The area's physical development, shaped by advances in transportation, technology, and the growth of the utility company shaped the district into a clearly

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definable geographic area, readily distinguishable from surrounding properties. The district is unified both by its historic building stock as well as its contiguity to the railroad line and the U.S. highway and its historic associations with industry.

Inventory

In the following inventory, buildings in the historic district are listed as contributing (C) if they were built within the period of significance, retain integrity, and add to the historic sense of time and place of the district. Noncontributing buildings (NC) were built within the last 50 years or are historic buildings that have been altered to a degree that has destroyed their historic integrity.

Beale

1. 653 Beale. (Dealers Truck Sales) (C) One-story irregular plan industrial building, three-by-eleven bays, covered with a brick veneer, built c. 1950. Flat built-up roof with a projecting soffit covered with aluminum. Windows are twenty-light steel frame sash with central six-light hopper windows. Off-center entry with one-leaf metal door. Six truck bays are on the west elevation.
2. 666-678 Beale (The Standard Sanitary Manufacturing Company). (C) Four-story irregular plan industrial building, nine-by-three bays, brick veneer, built c. 1926. Flat roof with stepped parapet topped with cast concrete coping and round decorative elements. The cornice is made up of a cast concrete belt course and brick modillions. There is a cast concrete sill course along the bottom of the second floor. Bays are delineated by large brick piers with inset cast concrete decorative elements. Ground floor windows are filled-in on the façade. Upper stories display three-over-one double-hung windows on facade and side elevations. Rear elevation windows are sixteen-light steel frame windows with central four-light hopper windows. Off-center entries with single-leaf metal replacement doors.
3. 688 Beale (Jimmy Moore Body Shop) (C) One-story brick and cinder block construction, with a flat roof with tile coping and an unadorned parapet wall, built c. 1955. There are three bays; one center entry with a one-light metal door and two vehicular bays. One of the vehicular bays has an overhead metal roll-up door, and the other has been filled with concrete block. An attached metal shed roof is on the east elevation.
4. 694 Beale. (Memphis Light and Power Company Substation) (C) One-story on a raised basement L-plan brick veneer industrial building, five-bays by five-bays divided by engaged piers topped with cast concrete finials, built c. 1925. Cast concrete foundation, and a flat roof with terra cotta coping. Sixteen-light metal hopper windows on facade and side elevations. Terra cotta stringcourse and inset wall decorations including date block are located along the top of the walls. The façade has an off-center entry with an original one-light door and a large entry with double-leaf metal vehicle service doors. The east elevation has double leaf metal doors on an overhead rail with an attached metal hoist.
5. 703 Beale. (Memphis Light and Power Company Building) (C) Two-story rectangular plan industrial building with six-by-eighteen bays, brick and frame construction, built c. 1891-1901 with Neo-classical style influences and with c. 1950 side and rear additions. Flat roof with parapet wall. Center section of the facade has an applied dentilated pediment and cornice, fluted pilasters with Ionic capitals, an ashlar pattern stone foundation, cornerstone, quoins, and incised wall decorations.

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Six-over-six double-hung windows with one-over-one double-hung sidelights set in Neo-Classical style arched stone lintels and keystones are located on both stories of the center section. The bottom sash of each of these windows has been replaced with a louvered vent. Flanking the center windows are paired double-hung multi-light windows with flat cast stone lintels and sills. The north façade of the east addition has a bank of multi-light metal hopper windows. The north facade of the west addition has two vehicular entries with overhead metal roll-up doors. The east elevation along Myrtle Street contains paired and individual multi-light steel frame casement windows. Some of these windows are set in arched openings. A vehicular entry with an overhead metal door is located at the south end of the east elevation, and a pedestrian entry with a single leaf door is in the central portion of the east elevation.

Garage-(C) Steel I-beam construction with brick veneer, one-story, L-shaped with flat roof, parking bays on west elevation, storage building on north, built c. 1950. Located to the west of 703 Beale.

Storage shed-(C) Metal frame, one -story with corrugated tin siding and shed roof, four open and two closed bays, c. 1950. A one-story brick section with two vehicular entries with sliding metal doors is on the west end of the structure. Located south of 703 Beale.

Linden

6. 690 Linden (N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company). (C) Two-story brick veneer industrial building, seven-bay, with Colonial Revival influence built c. 1924. Flat roof, stepped parapet with cast stone coping and inset cast concrete wall decorations. Bays are divided by engaged brick columns topped with cast concrete finials. The facade has single and paired commercial windows on the ground floor, triple windows on the second level with cast concrete sills and lintels. First floor facade windows are filled, and the second floor façade windows are boarded but retain the original windows. The other elevations retain original multi-light casement windows and double-hung windows. The central entrance is flanked by two-story engaged cast concrete columns with Doric capitals and display windows. The original two-leaf entry with single lights and full sidelights is boarded but remains in place. The c. 1960 one-story, rear addition is concrete block construction with I-beam and corrugated metal flat roof and raised foundation, with four truck bays with metal overhead doors and a center single leaf entrance with metal door. The rear addition connects to the rear of the building at 708 Linden.
7. 708 Linden Avenue (Firestone Tire and Rubber Company). (C) Two-story, six-bay, brick veneer and cast stone industrial building with Colonial Revival influence built c. 1926. Bays are delineated by two story brick piers. Flat roof covered with built-up roofing behind a flat cast concrete parapet with a cornice decorated with fluted panels. Ground floor display windows are filled with concrete block. Boarded second story windows are eight-over-eight, double-hung windows. Incised two-bay loading dock on west end of south façade is supported by a brick and concrete pier. Cast concrete spandrel panels between first and second stories have bas-relief ornamentation with swags, garlands, and medallions. Center single leaf entrance is boarded.
8. Linden Avenue Subway. (C) Built in 1924, twenty feet in height. The structure is poured concrete, five arcaded spans wide and displays box columns with simple square capitals. The underpass is divided into two automobile lanes separated by support piers, with flanking sidewalk lanes on the outer sides. The edges of the railroad right of way are defined by a cast concrete balustrade made up square newel posts and balusters with stepped caps and bases beneath a simple squared rail.

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Southern Railway Industrial Historic District,
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Orleans

9. 214 Orleans. (Memphis Light Gas and Water Building) (C) One-story, five by eleven bays, steel frame construction with brick veneer industrial building built in 1950. Flat roof with cast concrete coping. Façade has multi-light hopper windows that are partially covered. Façade has four engaged brick piers. The façade has a large central vehicular entry with a roll-up metal door topped by a cast concrete incised nameplate. The side elevations have a series of multi-light hopper windows.

Vehicle Fueling Station Building. (C) One-story, three-by-one bay, rectangular plan, flat roof, masonry construction, built c. 1940. Façade has central entry with single-light wood door and three-light metal hopper windows. Metal grills have been placed over the windows.

Two Fueling stations. (NC) c. 1980 metal canopies supported with metal poles with gas pumps underneath are located on east rear of lot.

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Southern Railway Industrial Historic District,
Shelby County, Tennessee

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Southern Railway Industrial Historic District in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significance in the transformation of the local agrarian, cotton-based economy to a more diversified industrial and commercial-based economy during the period of 1891-1956. Contextually the district relates to the historical themes of transportation, commerce and industry. The district's development over time exemplifies the evolution of transportation and distribution technologies as the city's first railroad was located here, providing proximity to railroad transport; and its major street, Linden Avenue, was designated as an early national highway which encouraged manufacturers to locate in the district in order to have access to easy vehicular transport. It was also the location of the city's first important electric utility, the Memphis Power and Light Company and it was the advent of widespread availability of electrical power here that played a crucial role in the economic history of Memphis.

Background

The Southern Railway Industrial Historic District is located within what was originally the 1783 Ramsey Land Grant. In 1848, the area became part of the short-lived town of South Memphis, developed by Robertson Topp, a promoter and investor in real estate as well as railroads. Topp saw the advantages of annexation for his town, which merged with the city of Memphis a year later. At that time, the city's eastern limit was extended to Walnut Street (two blocks east of the district) where it remained until 1899.

Memphis' early economic growth was almost completely tied to the production of cotton. By the 1850s the city was the largest inland cotton market in the world. Prior to the railroads, the Mississippi and its tributaries served as the north-south route to the Atlantic Ocean and most cotton came and went by river.¹

Early Memphis' chance for greatness was seen in the construction of the city's first significant railroad. The first attempt at harnessing the 'iron horse' failed when entrepreneur John McLemore began the region's first railroad, the La Grange Line & Memphis Railroad Company in 1831. After laying only 12 miles of track, the project collapsed for lack of financing in 1843.²

According to Robert Sigafoos, the basic premise for the McLemore's railroad was sound. The new steam railroad could reduce Memphis's dependency on river transportation. Advances in transportation technology in the 1840s were considered a tremendous opportunity for Memphis and its economic development.³ The business and trade potential of underwriting the railroad was promoted by South Memphis developer Robertson Topp and by Robert Brinkley, the son-in-law of proprietor Judge John Overton, who proposed a route running along the undeveloped eastern edge of the city through the Southern Railway Industrial Historic District. Their efforts paid off when, in 1852, the city underwrote \$500,000 in bonds, and the Memphis & Charleston (later Southern Railway/Norfolk Southern Line) Railroad was chartered. Construction of the railroad was finished in 1856.⁴

¹ Sigafoos, Robert A. *From Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 15.

² Gambrill, Louise. *"DeSoto Park" Its Romance and History 1541-1941*. (Memphis: City of Memphis, 1941) 16-18.

³ Sigafoos, 28-29.

⁴ Sigafoos, 17-20

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But larger national issues were at play here, as well. The success of northern congressmen in barring slavery in California, the popularity of an all-northern California Trail route, and the railroads being rapidly built around Chicago and St. Louis worried local leaders. Southern congressional representatives pressed for an all-southern route to the west coast and in response, Congress sent five survey teams to explore possible railroad routes to California. In 1854 the survey results were reviewed by then U.S. Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, who concluded that the southern route would be the most cost-effective. This spurred Memphians' aspirations, but when southern congressmen left Congress in 1861 as a prelude to the Civil War, whatever hopes Memphis held for a trans-Pacific route were ended.⁵

More than ten years of intensive promotion by Memphis entrepreneurs and their political representatives went for naught. Although the city tried to capitalize regionally in economic development generated by the Memphis & Charleston Railroad (M&C), Memphis remained a one-product economy, and mainly cotton warehouses and coal and lumberyards located by the rail lines. The M&C was sold to the Southern Railway Company in 1898 and continues to operate today as the Norfolk-Southern Line.⁶

One of the fatal flaws in the early 19th century boosterism efforts of the town's leading citizens was that they did not extend to more mundane matters like a clean water supply and sewers. In the decade of the 1870s, Memphis was decimated by cholera, dysentery, and the dreaded yellow fever epidemics, which resulted in a large loss of population. Financial corruption and mismanagement also came into play, resulting in the loss of the city charter in 1879, reducing the city's status to a taxing district governed by the state.⁷

In the 1880s Memphis at last began to deal systematically with its civic deficiencies and began to overcome its economic woes. After the epidemic's catastrophic toll on the city's economic and social life, Memphis finally installed a sanitary sewer system and discovered a public water supply of pure artesian water. Another major economic turning point for the city was the arrival of the modern electric utility industry in 1882, when General Samuel T. Carnes and Dr. D. T. Porter founded the pioneering Brush Electric Light and Power Company. The Brush electric company featured the four key elements of a modern electric utility system: reliable central generation, efficient distribution, a successful end use, and a competitive price. Competition arrived in 1885 in the form of the Memphis Thompson-Houston Electric Light Company. An 1887 merger of the two competing companies began the city's first important electric utility, the privately held Memphis Light and Power Company (MLPC). Thus began an intense effort to put Memphis in the mainstream of American urban economic life.⁸

Although Memphis did not have the local capability to produce or transmit hydroelectric power, the M&C Railroad did provide excellent transport for coal shipped from Alabama, which was used to generate power. In 1891, the district's industrial growth was spurred when MLPC purchased the corner of Beale and Myrtle streets adjacent to the M&C tracks as the site of their new coal-burning, electric power generating station. The original building, a two-story brick structure, was set back from the street in order to accommodate future expansions and is currently the central portion of the building at 703 Beale. The second floor housed the dynamo or generator room and the engine room was on the ground floor. The dynamos were driven from below by a main shaft powered by two tandem engines. The electrical power it generated was used to run the Memphis Street Railways or trolleys, for street lighting, and for commercial power needs.⁹

⁵ Bushong, David and Dawn Emord. "The Transcontinental Railroad." September 6, 2006. <<http://www.bushong.net/>>

⁶ Johnson, Judith A. "Rich Man, Preacher Man, Soul Man, History of South Memphis." (Memphis: Memphis Landmarks Commission, 2005), 17.

⁷ Sigafos, 56-59.

⁸ *People You Can Count On: a Historical Review*, Memphis: Memphis Light Gas & Water Division, 1997, 1-3.

⁹ "Electrical Enterprise" *Memphis Scimitar* [Memphis, TN], October 1891

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Southern Railway Industrial Historic District,
Shelby County, Tennessee

In 1901, MLPC received a second ten-year charter and spent \$600,000 to enlarge and upgrade the power generating facility on Beale.¹⁰ As a direct consequence of those growing efficiencies, small privately-owned power companies merged with, purchased electricity from, or were absorbed quickly by ever-larger, more efficient private multi-service systems. Systems and cities became interconnected with high voltage transmission lines.¹¹

MLPC followed this national trend by merging with the Equitable Gas Light Company in 1902 to form the Memphis Consolidated Gas and Electricity Company, remaining in private hands but expanding its customer base by supplying energy for ever growing public demand as well as the rapidly expanding street car system. In 1905 the city granted the Merchants Power Company of Maine a 25-year franchise to supply gas and electricity confined to street lighting and the downtown business section of the city. Once again, following the national model, in 1917 the Merchants Power Company and Memphis Consolidated Gas and Electricity merged to form the Memphis Gas and Electric Company.¹²

The introduction of popularly priced automobiles in the teens also brought economic growth and changed land use patterns in the district and throughout the city, as well as negatively impacting the Memphis street car passenger volume, which dropped from an all-time high of 52.3 million a year in 1920, to only 41.5 million in 1925. Memphis Gas and Electric Company, which owned the Memphis Street Railway Company, went into receivership in 1922. F.B. Olham of New York purchased the power and street railway companies for \$12 million dollars in 1924. A newly incorporated Memphis Power and Light Company (MP&L) would now provide the public and the streetcars with light and power.¹³

In 1925 MP&L built a new smaller substation at 694 Beale Street across from the original power generating facility on Beale expressly for converting alternating current to direct current to run the diminishing number of streetcars.¹⁴ The importance of the electrical company to transportation and industrial growth in the 1920s was aptly summarized by an advertisement in the 1927 Memphis City Directory:

“The rapid growth of Memphis is due in large measure to the high standards of public utility services consistently maintained by these two institutions: The Memphis Power & Light Company and The Memphis Street Railway Company.”¹⁵

The stockmarket crash of 1929 and the ensuing Depression stifled new industrial development in the subject area for several years. However, utility consumption continued to grow, and by this time many prominent Memphians felt that the city should own all the utilities so they could be operated locally, free from interference from far off companies and non-local interests.

The utility companies were also a very financially lucrative growth industry. From 1901 to 1932, electric utility capacity and generation grew at annual average rates of about 12 percent a year, despite a 14 percent absolute drop in generation from 1929 to the Depression-era low in 1932. Large, efficient private systems, such as Memphis Power and Light, provided 94 percent of all electricity. Electricity prices

¹⁰ “Best in the South”. *Commercial Appeal* [Memphis, TN], May 1902

¹¹ *History of the U.S. Electric Power Industry, 1882-1990-Appendix A*. 1995. September 8, 2006

<http://www.eia.doe.gov/>

¹² Marshall, Hazel. *Memphis Power & Light Company*. (Memphis: Federal Writer’s Project for Tennessee State Guide, 1935), 2.

¹³ Marshall, 2-3.

¹⁴ Karl Limberg. Personal interview. September 9, 2006.

¹⁵ Polk, H.L. 1927 Memphis City Directory.

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dropped, with nominal residential electricity prices falling to 5.6 cents per kilowatt hour in 1932, about a third of their price at the beginning of the century. In 1907, only eight percent of all dwellings had electricity, but by 1932, this figure had risen to 67 percent.¹⁶ Locally, in 1934 alone MP&L served a total population of over 264,000 in six communities including Memphis, Germantown, Millington, Arlington, Bartlett, and Collierville.

By 1932 considerably more than 80 percent of urban dwellings were electrified, while only 11 percent of farm dwellings had electrical service. This disparity between urban and rural service led to demands by farm interests for government help in obtaining electric power. When the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was formed in 1933 to meet these demands, many felt that the opportunity had arrived for Memphis to obtain even cheaper electric power because a city-owned distribution system of TVA power would further reduce the cost of electricity by 45%.¹⁷ On November 6, 1934, Memphians voted 32,735 to 1,868 to authorize a bond issue to acquire or construct an electrical distribution system. The Memphis Light and Water Division was formed to oversee the power and water systems and a contract was signed with TVA. Because, the privately owned MP&L already had an electric distribution system in place, the city asked MP&L to open formal negotiations to sell its properties to the city. When no quick agreement could be reached, the city threatened to build a competing electric distribution system.

After years of litigation and negotiations, a sale agreement for purchase of MP&L properties was finally reached in February 1939. Under the provisions of the sale the city received all electrical distribution facilities including the two generating buildings on Beale for a little over 17 million dollars. In June 1939, the Memphis Light Gas and Water Division (MLG&W) was officially born.¹⁸

The period following the end of World War II marked a time of essentially uninterrupted prosperity for the electric utility industry. Demand for electricity grew rapidly, consistently, and predictably, while electricity prices continued to fall. MLG&W began a vast utility construction program in 1950 which impacted the district. The original 703 Beale Street building was beginning to show its age, but would be expanded and converted into a central shop in 1950. Also in the district a second shop was added at 214 Orleans Street around the same time

Eventually MLG&W acquired the entire block bounded by Myrtle, Beale, Orleans and Linden, and the truck sales and service building at 653 Beale was acquired by MLG&W for use in 1985. MLG&W divested itself of the 1926 substation in 1970, but it remains in use today as a fire alarm manufacturing company.¹⁹

Despite great efforts to diversify Memphis's economic base, and to the chagrin of local leaders, Memphis's economy still remained largely dependent on raw cotton at the end of the 19th century.²⁰ Numerous groups were formed to advance the industrialization of the city, including The Young Men's Business League, organized in 1892, the Memphis Merchant's Exchange, and the prominent Industrial League, which eventually became the Chamber of Commerce.²¹

Although signs of growing industrialization could be found locally in the first two decades of the 20th Century, as a result of World War I, local cotton production actually increased, leading to a 1920 cotton

¹⁶ History of the U.S. Electric Power Industry, 1995 *September 8, 2006*.

¹⁷ Marshall, 5.

¹⁸ *People You Can Count On: A Historical Review*, 6-7.

¹⁹ Karl Limberg, Personal Interview. September 9, 2006. .

²⁰ Sigafoos, 70-71.

²¹ Sigafoos, 86.

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market panic, which sent prices plummeting. This event finally made Memphis business leaders commit to stimulate greater economic development. In its favor, Memphis had little organized industrial labor, cheap land, and the availability of abundant, cheap electricity and natural gas to attract “more smokestacks and more payrolls.”²²

In fact, many Memphians felt that the main obstacle facing the city in terms of economic expansion was the instability of local government. After political boss E. H. Crump was ousted as mayor in 1915, political instability reigned to such an extent that the city had seven mayors or acting mayors in four years. A group of prominent and civic-minded businessmen, the Citizen’s League, concerned about the turmoil in the city government, eventually backed a business administration platform and helped elect progressive businessman Rowlett Paine in 1920.²³

Local civic groups had long been advocating a plan for Memphis and during Paine’s first term, Memphis became the first city in Tennessee to implement city planning and zoning regulations.²⁴ At the 1921 session of the Tennessee Legislature, Memphis was successful in securing the passage of a comprehensive zoning law. Mayor Paine established a planning commission and hired the prestigious St. Louis planning firm of Harland Bartholomew to prepare the *First Annual Report of the Memphis Planning Commission*, a zoning plan first implemented in 1922, and finalized in 1924.

This document, which noted that, “Lamar-Somerville-Linden is a traffic artery of great usefulness,” had a direct impact on the Southern Railway Industrial Historic District.²⁵ Linden Avenue’s significance in the circulation system appeared early in the planner’s studies of streets, which found that the most serious handicap to the efficiency of Lamar Boulevard was its awkward terminus. Lamar once came directly into the heart of Memphis, but, to quote the *First Annual Report*, “through unregulated land platting the route was obliterated west of Somerville Street, leaving traffic to find it way by twists and turns into the central section.”²⁶ The plan called for gravel-paved Linden Avenue to be connected via Linden Circle (also known as Somerville) to Lamar Boulevard and paved, a recommendation that was implemented immediately.

The district’s other major problem was at-grade railroad crossings which impeded automotive traffic. The report called for a comprehensive grade separation program and as part of the upgrading of Linden, in 1923 induced the Southern Railway to construct a poured concrete subway where the railway crossed Linden, lowering the roadbed to allow for an unimpeded flow of vehicular traffic.²⁷

²² Ibid, 142

²³ Ibid, 138-139.

²⁴ Bartholomew, Harland. “First Annual Report, City Planning Commission, Memphis, Tennessee, 1921.” (Memphis: City of Memphis Planning Commission, 1921), 117

²⁵ Bartholomew, 91.

²⁶ Ibid, 39-41.

²⁷ Bartholomew, 7.

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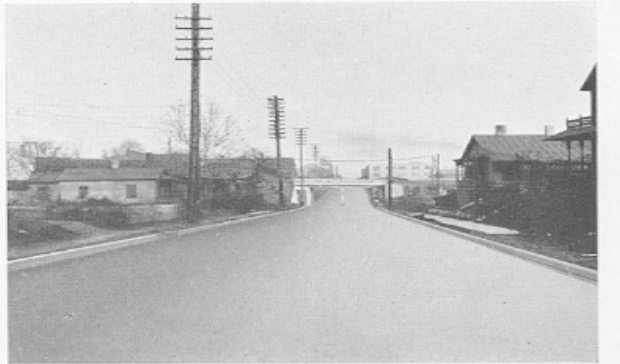
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Linden Avenue was a very uninviting street in 1922.



Linden Avenue, looking east from Orleans Street, after improvement, showing separation of railroad grade crossing by subway.

As a result of these upgrades, in 1926, the American Association of State Highway Officials designated Linden Avenue at Second Street as the western terminus of U.S. Highway 78, a two-lane, open access national highway which runs 715 miles east to Charleston, South Carolina.²⁸ This set the stage for the continued expansion of the district.

As the Bartholomew report called for lands adjacent to railroad lines to be zoned industrial, national companies began locating manufacturing and distribution facilities in the district. The first was the N.O. Nelson Manufacturing Company, a Missouri-based plumbing goods and fire hydrant business (NONCO brand), which opened their Memphis branch at 690 Linden in 1925. Nelson's Colonial Revival warehouse was designed by company architect A. E. Cameron. Due to the progressive business vision of its founder, the Nelson Company pioneered in improving the social conditions of its employees through providing home ownership, profit sharing, and participatory management.



NONCO fire hydrants

The company's commitment to quality affordable housing for their employees extended to providing single-family housing for workers in Memphis. The Shelby County Registrar of Deeds records indicate that between the years 1930 and 1950 more than 30 lots were purchased by the N.O. Nelson Company and

²⁸Droz, Robert. *End of U.S. Highway 78*. 2002. November 11, 2006. <http://www.us-highways.com/>

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were subsequently sold to associates. The firm's associates could secure an improved lot for \$100 to \$150, and the company would even construct an employee's house if desired. An installment payment system was provided, or a home could be purchased outright. The cost consisted of labor, materials and the firm's nominal profit, thereby reducing employees' home construction costs. Monthly payments were based on family size.



Plans for a Nelson Company \$1,200 home of four rooms with plumbing and electricity.
Photo courtesy of the Harvard University Library's Fogg Museum

By 1948 the N.O. Nelson Company's manufacturing activities ceased, but it continued to operate as a wholesale distributor of plumbing and plumbing-related products. By July 1956, the company was bankrupt and the Memphis property at 690 Linden was sold.²⁹ The building was subsequently used as a local dry goods warehouse until the early 1970s. At that time it was connected to the 708 Linden building, and continued to be used as a warehouse facility until 2005.

By 1927, the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, by now a leader in tire manufacturing, had arrived in the district at 708 Linden Avenue. The company's warehouse and distribution building was designed to promote Firestone's "Ship by Truck" campaign, encouraging manufacturers to move their products to markets by truck. The warehouse displayed a prominent two-bay truck dock on the west side of the building's façade and downplayed the railroad doors tucked discretely on the east side. In fact, the very first coast-to-coast truck shipment of goods traveled on Firestone tires. Firestone advertising of the era hailed its tires as producing the "most miles per dollar."³⁰ The Firestone tire distribution facility remained at the 708 Linden address until 1943.

²⁹ Holder, Bob and Carl Lossau. "The N. O. Nelson and LeClaire Story." 2002. August, 12, 2006. <http://www.refreshers.com/holder9/html>

³⁰ Bridgestone Americas Holding, Inc. 2006. July 14, 2006. <http://www.bridgestone-firestone.com>.

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LEO C. WURTZBURGER
General Manager

WALTER F. GILLILAND
Sales Manager

ACME PAPER CO.
EVERYTHING IN PAPER

Prompt Service — Quality Merchandise
"Streamlined With Experience"

WRAPPING PAPER — TISSUES — TOWELS — PAPER BAGS — SCHOOL SUPPLIES
STATIONERY — TOILET PAPER — TWINES — BOXES — CUPS



708 Linden Ave. (at the Viaduct) Phone—5-2626
MERCHANDISE NOW ON DISPLAY—VISIT US

The building was then leased to the Acme Paper Company. According to the above advertisement in H. L. Polk's 1945 Memphis City Directory, Acme was a wholesale distributor of "everything in paper." A few years later, in 1951, a local household appliance distributor, the Wallace E. Johnston Company, began using the warehouse at 708 Linden as their local retail outlet. The socially prominent Wallace Johnston had opened his first appliance store at 1055 Union Avenue in 1932 during the Great Depression and became one of the top retail dealers in the country. In 1936, he moved west on Union and became a distributor for General Electric and other major appliances. He was an organizer and president of the National Appliance Radio and Television Dealers Association as well as the president of the Memphis Appliance Dealers Association.³¹ In 1956, the building was leased to a wholesale electrical equipment distributor. In 1970 it was sold to United Coatings, who also purchased 690 Linden at the same time and connected them by a cinderblock passageway to be used as a warehouse until 1990. The building was then purchased for use as an imported decorative goods distribution and warehouse location until 2005.

The Standard Sanitary Manufacturing Company at 678 Beale was the last national manufacturer to locate in the district, in 1927. Headquartered in Pittsburgh, PA, Standard Sanitary Mfg. Co. was formed in 1899 in a merger of several companies manufacturing enameled cast iron sanitary ware. Standard Sanitary pioneered many of the plumbing product improvements introduced in the early part of the 19th century, including the one piece toilet, built-in tubs, combination faucets (to mix hot and cold water to deliver tempered water) and tarnish-proof, corrosion-proof chrome finishes for brass fittings.³²

³¹ "Wallace E. Johnston Dies; Owner of Appliance Firm." *Commercial Appeal* [Memphis, TN], August 1978.

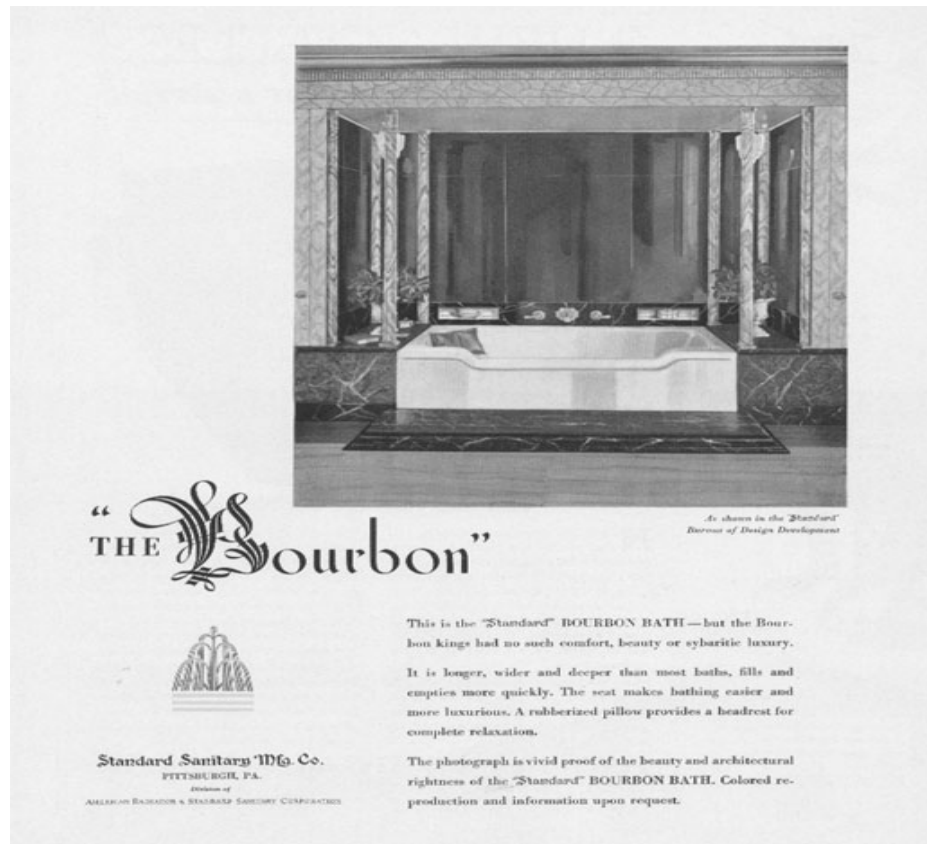
³² Salina Supply Company. *American Standard*. September 4, 2006. <http://www.salinasupply.com/>

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September, 1932 advertisement for Standard Sanitary Mfg. Co. (Courtesy: store.pastpresent.com/index)

After being sold by Standard Sanitary Manufacturing in 1970, the property at 666-678 Beale was purchased by the Happy Hal Toy and Gifts Company. This company was founded by a local television personality who became a successful manufacturer and distributor of toys and novelty items. In 1990 it was purchased by Alabaster Originals, a light manufacturing firm. In 1999 it was then purchased by an information technology firm who upgraded the wiring and installed underground fiber optic cables in the hope of becoming an information age firm. Since the collapse of Internet and other high tech stocks in 2000, the building has been vacant and is currently for sale.

Within the overall context of historic industrial development in Memphis, The Southern Railway Industrial Historic District bears some similarities to the South Bluffs Warehouse Historic District (NR 6/04/1987), in that both areas lie in close proximity to railroad services; both were the sites of early industries and distribution facilities and began development at the same time. However, the two districts differ in that, as the railroads declined, so did the wholesale business in the South Bluffs Warehouse District and development had essentially ended by 1941.

Whereas the 1926 designation of Linden Avenue as U. S. Highway 78 which continues to serve as an economic artery for the district and the expansion of the Memphis Light Gas & Water physical plant has allowed the Southern Railway Industrial Historic District to retain its vigor. The building stock remains intact and the majority of the buildings in the district are still in use today.

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Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

All that area encompassed within the areas defined by the boundaries of the parcels that comprise the district. The northern boundary is the rear property lines of the north side of Beale Street then turns south on Myrtle and continues south to the Norfolk Southern Railroad line, then follows that south to Linden. The west boundary begins at the west property line of 678 Beale Street, then south across Beale on Orleans to the southern property line of the Memphis Light Gas & Water property line, then east along Jessamine and then turns south along the western property line of 690 Linden and continues east until reaching the Southern Railroad line. See attached property tax map.

The district maintains a high level of integrity with a significant concentration of buildings and structures that present a distinguishable entity and form a unified, cohesive whole. Resources in the district are linked historically by physical development and functional interrelationships, and land use patterns of the period.

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Current Ownership of District Buildings

653 Beale Street- Mr. Joseph Lee, President, City of Memphis, MLG&W Division, 220 S. Main Street, Memphis, TN 38103

678 Beale Street- Mr. Jeff Mixson, Holder Properties, UST LLC, 3333 Riverwood Parkway, Suite 500, Atlanta, GA 30339

688 Beale Street –Mr. Karl Limberg, Lasco Fire Protection S, Inc. 694 Beale, Memphis, TN 38103

694 Beale Street - Mr. Karl Limberg, Lasco Fire Protection Services, 694 Beale, Memphis, TN, 38103

703 Beale Street -City of Memphis, MLG&W Division, 220 S. Main Street, Memphis, TN 38103

690 Linden Avenue- Mr. Stephen Turgeon, Linden Yards LLC, 11 So. Orleans, Memphis, TN 38103

708 Linden Avenue- Mr. Stephen Turgeon, Linden Yards LLC, 11 So. Orleans, Memphis, TN 38103

214 Orleans Street- City of Memphis, MLG&W Division, 220 S. Main Street, Memphis, TN 38103

Linden Avenue Subway-Mr. Randy Noe, Norfolk Southern Corporation, 3 Commercial Place, Law Department, Norfolk, VA 23510-9227

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Photographs

Photographs by: Judith Johnson

Date: August, 2006

Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission

- 1 of 20 Streetscape of Linden Avenue looking east
- 2 of 20 Streetscape of Linden Avenue from Subway looking west
- 3 of 20 Streetscape of Beale Street from railroad track looking east
- 4 of 20 View of railroad track from Beale Street looking north
- 5 of 20 View of railroad track from Beale Street looking south
- 6 of 20 View of 690 Linden Avenue looking east
- 7 of 20 View of 708 Linden looking northeast
- 8 of 20 Detail of 708 Linden Avenue looking north
- 9 of 20 Detail of 708 Linden Avenue
- 10 of 20 View of 214 Orleans Street looking northeast
- 11 of 20 View of 703 Beale Street looking southwest
- 12 of 20 Detail of 703 Beale Street
- 13 of 20 Rear elevation of 703 Beale Street from Myrtle looking northwest
- 14 of 20 View of outbuilding at rear of 703 Beale looking southwest
- 15 of 20 View of 694 Beale Street looking northeast
- 16 of 20 View of 690 Beale looking northwest
- 17 of 20 View of 666-678 Beale looking northwest
- 18 of 20 View of 666-678 Beale looking northeast
- 19 of 20 View of 653 Beale looking southwest
- 20 of 20 View of 653 looking southeast